

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DHS TRIES TO KILL DIRTY BOMB PROTECTION PROGRAM

Markey demands to know why funds are secretly transferred

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a Senior Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security and the Energy and Commerce Committee today released a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, asking why the Metropolitan Medical Response System, a program to protect U.S. cities from terrorist dirty bomb attacks is being quietly eliminated, while DHS officials claim otherwise publicly.

“We know that al Qaeda is trying to obtain radioactive materials for a dirty bomb.” said Rep. Markey. “We know hundreds of radioactive sources have been lost or stolen in the U.S. over the last five years. Along with efforts to prevent terrorists from getting dirty bomb materials, we must help prepare local first responders to deal with dirty bomb attacks. The Metropolitan Medical Response System does this in more than 120 U.S. cities, including Boston, Worcester and Springfield. The secret attempt to starve this program is another example of the Bush Administration ignoring hometown security.”

The Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS), established in the wake of the terrorist release of sarin nerve gas in a Tokyo subway in 1995, provides funds to municipal authorities to coordinate local first responders in reacting to terrorist WMD events. Local authorities must deliver an integrated plan of response to biological, chemical and radiological (dirty bomb) attacks in order to receive the funds. On March 24, 2004, DHS Under Secretary Michael Brown testified before the House Appropriations Homeland Security subcommittee that MMRS funds would be expended as appropriated. However, Rep. Markey has learned that the Director of the Preparedness Division at DHS has been instructed to “redirect” 80% of MMRS’ \$50 million FY2004 funds to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). By law, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees must be notified 15 days in advance of any significant reprogramming of these funds. Rep. Markey asked Secretary Ridge:

1. Why was the instruction to transfer MMRS funds to OMB given?
2. Who made the decision to issue the instruction, when was it made, and on what basis?
3. How much of MMRS’ \$50 million FY 2004 appropriation has already been spent and/or committed?
4. Why have the House and Senate Appropriations Committees not received requests for this reprogramming, and why did Under Secretary Brown testify otherwise on March 24, 2004?
5. What goal or purpose for this money does DHS feel is more important than protecting American cities from biological, chemical and radiological terrorist attacks?
6. Will the Department take action to reverse the instruction to redirect MMRS funds to OMB?

Rep. Markey concluded, “The Administration’s FY2004 request included no money for MMRS, but Congress wisely chose to appropriate \$50 million for this important program. It appears the Bush Administration is trying to go around Congress to kill it.”

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey’s website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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